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AFOSR 50th Anniversary celebration reflects on past, focuses on future

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WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — An all-star cast of the world's finest scientists and engineers celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR) on April 25 in Washington D.C. The commemoration reflected on the past and focused on future goals.

The event, which took place in the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, included exhibits from the Air Force Research Laboratory's nine technology directorates and AFOSR; a keynote address and luncheon with the Chairman of the House Science Committee Sherwood Boehlert (R-N.Y.); and was framed by a series of world-renowned guest speakers.

The theme of the event, "Celebrating 50 years of Scientific Breakthroughs for the Warfighter," concentrated on the essence of what AFOSR does best: building the foundation for revolutionary breakthroughs in science and technology.

"Organizations like the Air Force Research Laboratory and the AFOSR are the wellsprings of innovation and discovery across disciplines of science and engineering," noted Boehlert. "We must continue to keep them healthy and vibrant so we may continue to keep the U.S. Air Force on the cutting edge far into the future."

Dr. Lyle Schwartz, Director of the AFOSR, kicked off the festivities with a video tracing the history of the soldier scientist from Archimedes to the past 50 years of accomplishments of the AFOSR. While lauding the accomplishments of the past half-century, Dr. Schwartz's speech focused on the years to come, a theme mentioned many times throughout the celebration.

"We seek the brightest minds," Schwartz said, "wherever they may be found."

Also in attendance were two Nobel laureates, Dr. Steven Chu and Dr. Alan J. Heeger, who spoke of the necessity of future scientific synthesis.

"The connection between physics and biology is fairly obvious," said Chu. "Without that connection, we would not have the scanning electron microscope, laser eye surgery or x-ray crystallography. AFOSR and its basic research are vital to technological advances in the future." Heeger concurred, adding "The key to fighting bioterrorism comes from the combination of disciplines in order to create technologies such as handheld anthrax sensors and the like."

Air Force Materiel Command commander Gen. Lester Lyles spoke about the contribution basic science made to the Air Operations Center, the vital weapon system of the Air Force.

"The heart and soul of the operational Air Force is the Air Operations Center," said Lyles, "and technologies such as the data wall and other technologies borne of basic science keep this heart and soul going."

Air Force Research Laboratory Commander Maj. Gen. Paul Nielsen agreed with the need to remember the past when focusing on the future.

"When Isaac Newton received credit for his scientific accomplishments, he said that it was because he stood on the shoulders of scientific giants of the past," Nielsen observed. "AFRL and the AFOSR accomplished much in the past five decades, and will continue to achieve great things for many more; thanks to the giants who have served in our laboratory and with our industry and academic partners"

Nielsen went on, "We must double and re-double our efforts in the 21st century—an exciting time of accelerating scientific discovery. We must continue to transform our military capabilities to protect our nation and the men and women we send into combat."

Other speakers included The Honorable Ronald Sega, director of Defense Research and Engineering and a former astronaut; Dr. Joseph Janni, the former Director of the AFOSR; James Engle, deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for science, technology and engineering; Dr. Ruth Pachter of AFRL; Dr. David Awschalom, Director of the UC Center for Spintronics and Quantum Computation; Dr. Malcolm O'Neill, Vice President and Chief Technical Officer of Lockheed Martin Corporation and Professor Daniel Hastings, Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics at MIT. **@**